

Mentoring [supplementary chapter]

Learning through mentoring in initial teacher education

Introduction

Mentoring is a means of providing support, challenge and extension of the learning of one person through the guidance of another who is more skilled, knowledgeable and experienced, particularly in relation to the context in which the learning is taking place. This chapter addresses mentoring in initial teacher education and is written partly for mentors and partly for trainee teachers. Another supplementary chapter, *Starting Out*, supports mentoring for newly qualified teachers and during the early years of professional development.

The importance of mentoring in modern initial teacher education reflects three trends. First, there is the growing professional recognition and understanding of the complexity of teachers' capabilities and of the need to study, practise and develop these within real school contexts. Second, the development of school-based and school-led initial training courses makes mentoring an absolutely key process in the development of high professional standards and the transfer of knowledge from one generation of teachers to the next.

Mentoring, and being guided by a mentor, provides excellent opportunities for the development of teaching skills and reflective understanding, both within subjects and more generically. After all, that is the essential rationale for establishing a relationship between a trainee and an experienced teacher. This stands whether or not it is underpinned by a conventional 'partnership' arrangement between a school and a higher education institution, or is associated with Teach First, School Direct, School-Centred Initial Teacher Training or any other employment-based route into teaching. It stands whether access to training is full-time or part-time, BEd or PGCE, fast-track, established or 'flexible'. Whatever the route or form of training, there is a clear pattern in which increasing responsibility for mentoring students is being taken on a whole-school basis, with subject specialists and senior management supplementing the more continuous support of a class-based mentor.

In a sense then, trainee teachers join a school community with established practices, and mentoring activity should be seen as contributing to the dynamics of a developing school as well as being engaged in personal learning. As Edwards and Collison put it:

We recognise a creative interaction between learners and contexts. The meanings of teaching and learning are constantly created, negotiated and tested by those who are acting and learning in those contexts. (1996, p. 7)

Agreement about roles and relationships within such arrangements is obviously crucial if their benefits are to be maximized, and this is true for teacher mentors, trainee teachers and, where appropriate, higher education tutors. If the roles are clear, then the learning potential of such situations is very considerable.

The role of the student is certainly the most important – and at this point we direct this text to you, the trainee-teacher reader:

Your approach to the new challenges you will meet is crucial. We might identify three dimensions of the role as you begin to enter the school community and develop as a professional. First, you need to present and organize yourself so that you become accepted within the school. This means being sensitive to customs and practices. Second, you need to be receptive to the efforts which your mentor(s) and tutor make, and be willing to develop a constructive relationship with them. Remember that being challenged by a mentor is an opportunity to learn – rather than an attack – though you should certainly feel able to enter into dialogue with them. Third, it is vital that you adopt an active, professional approach to the development of skills and understanding, and that that advice

is received openly. You can also contribute a great deal to any necessary assessment phase, through the quality of your self-evaluation activities.

The role of the mentor has been usefully analysed by Sampson and Yeomans (1994). They suggest that it has three dimensions. These are *structural* – working across the school as planner, organizer, negotiator, inductor for the student placement; *supportive* – working with the student as host, friend and counsellor; *professional* – working with the student as trainer, educator and assessor. Recent developments in mentoring put further emphasis on providing analysis of performance, both generically and in relation to particular subjects, and in offering both advice and challenge. The further professionalization of teaching assistants adds a new dimension to mentoring. Experienced teaching assistants may have a role in introducing student teachers to some aspects of classroom life.

The role of a tutor from a higher education institution, if the training route provides for this support, can also be seen in terms of these three dimensions. Structurally, he or she would often have established relationships with 'link' or 'partnership' schools, so that the placement could be negotiated smoothly. The tutor would then facilitate and support the relationship between the student and mentor as it develops, so that the potential benefits of that learning relationship are forthcoming. Professionally, the tutor would expect to contribute to the educational process by offering comparative experience and knowledge from reading and research. In the assessment phase he or she is able to draw on comparative judgement and may be able to enhance consistency of judgement across schools. There are interesting differences across the British Isles regarding the role of higher education tutors in school-based elements of teacher education. Broadly, this is stronger at present in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland than it is in England. In Ireland, tutors also remain very important in supporting school-based student work.

Learning Through Mentoring

If roles, relationships and channels for communication are established and open, then the potential for constructive professional learning is considerable. Focusing specifically on this, Peter Tomlinson (1995) provided a useful summary of four major forms of student learning activity and mentoring assistance, and these are set out below:

Major forms of student learning activity and mentoring assistance (Tomlinson, 1995)

1. Assisting students to learn from other people teaching by: explaining the planning guiding observation of the action modelling and prompting monitoring modelling and prompting reflection
2. Assisting students to learn through their own teaching activities by: assisting their planning supporting their teaching activity assisting monitoring and feedback assisting analysis and reflection
3. Progressively collaborative teaching involving: progressive joint planning teaching as a learning team mutual monitoring joint analysis and reflection
4. Exploring central ideas and broader issues through: direct research on pupil, colleague, school and system contexts reading and other inputs on teaching and background issues organised discussion on these topics

This is an exciting agenda in which the mentor provides support at each stage of the teaching cycle. Indeed, in many ways the mentor–student relationship is very close to that which is discussed in relation to social constructivist models of learning. Thus the mentor 'assists the performance' and 'scaffolds the understanding' of the student learner, as he or she constructs his or her own skills and understanding in the classroom context. Initially then, as a trainee, you may need direct support by explanation, modelling and guidance with the analysis of issues and with evaluation. Gradually, however, you will become sufficiently confident to teach more independently. Greater challenges will be faced (larger groups, longer teaching sessions, more complex teaching aims) and you will begin to monitor your performance more independently. Collaborative teaching will reinforce these emergent skills and understandings as you get more experience.

The mentor is thus uniquely placed to offer support and challenge in Tomlinson's first three ways (learning from others, learning from their own teaching, collaborating with others). Where available, tutors from higher education institutions are likely to be able to make a particular contribution to the fourth element of exploring key concepts, broader issues and recent research.

Professional Development Together

2.1 Common stages of student learning

Effective mentoring involves the use of professional skills, such as those reviewed above, in appropriate responses to the changing learning needs of students. But what do we know about the way in which trainee teachers may develop?

An examination of research literature on the process of learning to teach confirms the common sense observation that trainees typically go through a number of distinct stages of development, each with its own focal concerns. Maynard and Furlong (1993) argued that these concerns can be grouped under the following headings: early idealism; survival; recognizing difficulties; hitting the plateau; and moving on. Of course, things may turn out differently, but this is a useful progression to reflect upon.

Early idealism

Before training begins, new student teachers are often highly idealistic about teaching. For many, this involves wanting to identify closely with the pupils and their needs and interests. This identification with the pupils is hardly surprising, since, for the vast majority of students in training, their only experience of the teaching process has been as pupils themselves. Such commitments are highly commendable, and may continue to underpin professional values for many years. However, once trainee teachers enter the classroom, such idealism can fade very quickly.

Survival

The first days and weeks in the classroom are often extremely challenging for students both professionally and personally. A common complaint is that it is difficult to 'see' what is *really* going on. Indeed, it is often hard to disentangle the complexities of teaching and to understand the processes involved. Either things appear to be straightforward – something that anyone can do – or they seem overwhelming in their complexity. In the early stages of school experience, time is often given for trainees to observe classroom practice. However, as Calderhead (1988) and (Doyle, 1977) confirm, this contact is often undervalued because interpretation of classroom noise and movement is difficult, and the significance of teacher actions may not be clear. In a nutshell, it is simply hard to know what it is one is supposed to be looking at and why! It is no wonder that at this stage students often go in search of 'quick fixes' and 'hints and tips'. Learning how to observe an experienced teacher and how to understand the different skills that he or she is using is thus an achievement in itself. It is something that students need to be supported in doing. In particular, one must allow time and avoid panic of any sort – things will eventually fall into place.

Another important feature of early classroom experiences is that trainees frequently become obsessed with their own survival; 'fitting in' and establishing themselves as a 'teacher' often become major issues for them. Rather than wanting to identify closely with the pupils, they become very concerned with how to 'manage' them. However, if achieving classroom management and control becomes the overriding concern, then teaching and learning activities begin to be judged almost entirely in terms of whether they contribute to achieving that end. Maynard and Furlong suggest that trainees are often

personally very stressed by this early period of learning to teach. In particular, many find it hard to come to terms with themselves as authority figures. They have to get used to a new persona, 'me-as-teacher' and for some, it is not a character they particularly like. As a consequence it is not uncommon for students to go through a period of resenting the pupils for forcing them to be more authoritarian than they really want to be.

Recognizing difficulties

Fortunately the confusion and challenges brought about by the first taste of teaching do not, in most cases, last more than a week or so. Slowly, the 'survival' stage gives way to a period where trainees can at least start to disentangle some of the complexities involved in teaching. They begin to identify some of the difficulties they face in learning to teach. However, this recognition brings its own pressures and they can be overwhelmed by the complexity of it all. As a result, despite assurances from teachers and tutors and attempts to help them view this as a 'learning experience', the dominant concern for most students at this early stage is, 'Will I pass?', 'Will I satisfy the standards?' In this circumstance, a common reaction is for trainees to try to replicate or mimic other teachers' behaviour. They develop an apparent competence by focusing on teaching strategies and classroom organization, 'acting' like a teacher without necessarily understanding the underlying purpose or implications of those actions.

Hitting the plateau

Eventually, most trainees do manage to at least 'act' like a teacher; they learn how to control the class and engage the pupils in some purposeful activity. However, Maynard and Furlong suggest that once students have achieved this level of competence, they may stop developing – they can 'hit a plateau'. After all, if we find a way of teaching that 'works' and offers security, there is certainly an incentive to stick to it! The challenge is then for school mentors to move the trainee on from 'acting like a teacher' towards 'thinking like a teacher'. We would suggest that the difference between these two states is that experienced teachers devote most of their attention to thinking about their pupils' learning rather than focusing on their own 'performance'. In other words, they are competent and confident enough to be able to 'de-centre' from themselves so that they can focus on the pupils. Evidence suggests that, in developing in this way, students benefit greatly from external support and some progressive development of practical teaching skills.

Moving on

There is one further stage of learning to teach and that involves the development of the trainee as a 'reflective practitioner' – a concept to which these books and resources contribute. To teach in this way is an appropriate ambition at any stage of a professional career, and a programme of initial teacher training can lay foundations. Nevertheless, as we gain in confidence, we are capable of taking more responsibility for our own professional development, for broadening our repertoire of teaching strategies, deepening our understanding of the complexities of teaching and learning, and for considering the social, moral and political dimensions of educational practice. We are also in a better frame of mind to think seriously about subject knowledge. Mentors and higher education tutors, working collaboratively, are well placed to help students analyse and reflect on their own teaching.

2.2 Mentoring each stage of student learning

Mentoring should be developmental so that trainees are supported through the different stages of learning to teach. However, it is important to emphasize that, in arguing for a developmental approach, we are not suggesting that mentors should simply provide whatever support they are asked for. Indeed, there will be times when mentors will need to be more assertive in their interventions, providing students with what it is judged that they 'need', even when this may not be what they immediately 'want'. However, in essence, mentoring is no different from any other form of teaching and it is necessary to start from where the learners are and take typical patterns of development into account.

Following Furlong *et al.* (1994), we outline a number of different stages of mentoring (see also Maynard, 2001). In each stage we can identify different learning priorities for the trainee and a different 'role' for the mentor in supporting those learning needs. We also suggest a number of key mentoring strategies. The development of any one student will be much more complex than a simple stage model implies; they will develop at their own rate and will need to revisit issues because they have forgotten them or wish to relearn them in a different context or at a deeper level. We therefore intend

these stages of mentoring to be considered flexibly and with sensitivity. In fact it is probably more appropriate to think of each stage as cumulative rather than discrete. As students develop, mentors will need to employ more and more strategies from the repertoire that we set out.

A summary of a developmental model of mentoring adapted from Furlong *et al.* (1994) is set out below:

A developmental model of mentoring

	Beginning Teaching	Supervised teaching	From teaching to learning	Reflective teaching
Stage of trainee development	Survival	Recognised difficulties	Hitting the plateau	Moving on
Focus of student learning	Rules, rituals, routines and establishing authority	Teaching competences	Understanding pupil learning and developing effective teaching	Taking control and developing professionalism
Role of mentor and tutor	Providing models of effective practice	As trainers, providing focused advice and instruction	As critical friends, providing constructive critique for development	As co-enquirers, joining together in aspects of professional development
Key mentoring strategies	Student observation focused on class routines and teacher techniques	Focused observation by trainee, combined with structured observation of the trainee and feedback	Focused observation by, and structured observation of, the trainee Re-examination of lesson planning	Partnership in teaching and supervision

Beginning teaching

As we indicated earlier, when trainees first begin the process of learning to teach, they often have two particular learning needs. They need to learn how to 'see' – to disentangle and identify some of the complexities of the teaching process. In particular, they are most concerned to discover how teachers achieve effective control within the classroom.

In developing an understanding of how to achieve classroom control, trainees face two particular difficulties. The first is that teachers often find it extremely difficult to explain how it is they achieve discipline and order. To an experienced teacher, classroom management is such a 'natural' process that it is difficult to discuss it in isolation from other aspects of teaching. The second difficulty is that by the time that the student arrives in school, usually part way through the year, teachers have already established relationships with their pupils. Much of the 'work' that goes into achieving order takes place at the beginning of the school year and thereafter is simply understood by teacher and pupils alike (see the chapter in *Reflective Teaching in Schools* on establishing relationships). By the time trainees arrive, many of the teacher's management strategies may be almost 'invisible'.

Because much of what the student most wants to learn may be tacit, and invisible to the untutored eye, we would suggest the focus for students in the earliest stages of learning to teach must necessarily be on the rules, routines and rituals of the classroom. By observing and copying these 'ready-made' strategies, trainees can more quickly come to participate in the classroom and begin to 'act' like a teacher.

At this stage, students can best be helped to make sense of the classroom and understand its rules, rituals and routines by observing and teaching collaboratively alongside their mentor. The Reflective Activities suggested on this website offer some starting points. By setting up focused observations and collaborative teaching, the mentor acts as a model for the trainees; interpreting events, guiding their observation, drawing their attention to what they are doing and why, and to the significance of what is happening in the classroom. Collaborative teaching also allows the trainee to begin to engage in substantive 'teaching', while the teacher, rather than the student, remains responsible for classroom management and control.

Supervised teaching

Once trainee teachers have gained some insight into the rules, routines and rituals of the classroom and, through carefully supported collaborative work, have themselves had some experience of teaching, then they will be ready for a more systematic and structured approach to training. As we indicated above, during this second phase of their teaching experience, trainees are likely to be mostly concerned with developing their own 'performance' as teachers. Their aim will be to achieve greater and greater control over the teaching and learning process. An important element of this will be developing more confidence with subject knowledge – and in particular the ways in which knowledge can be taught effectively. We suggest that this development can be supported best if the class mentor (and subject mentor(s), if appropriate) explicitly develop a formal 'training' role, focusing directly on the standards or competences of teaching.

In reality of course, teaching cannot be fully characterized as a series of discrete competences or standards because the whole is always more than the sum of the parts. Thus, to extract one particular element from a complex process like teaching is necessarily artificial. Nevertheless, to simplify the complexity for training purposes, there are benefits in mentors focusing on specific teaching competences in a structured way.

As part of their systematic training, students will continue to need to observe and investigate classroom practices, though now their focus might benefit by being even more tightly geared to issues which have been identified for further development. The Reflective Activities from this website and associated books should provide many ideas for worthwhile activities. In addition, we would suggest that mentors and tutors provide similarly focused observation and feedback on specific teaching competences.

In terms of the *content* of training, the broad focus is provided by 'official' standards and competences which may be set by a government or national agency. The degree of specificity of guidance the mentor and tutor need to give the trainee will vary depending on the stage of the student's development and their success in managing the particular competence successfully. The more difficulty a trainee has, the more helpful it is for the mentor and tutor to give specific guidance.

From teaching to learning

Once trainees have gained sufficient confidence in classroom management and control in order to 'act' like a teacher, then they are able to turn their attention away from their own performance, and look more deeply at the content of their lessons in terms of what their pupils are actually learning. As we saw earlier, Furlong *et al.* (1994) called this process 'de-centring'.

Developing the ability to de-centre, to reassess one's teaching in terms of pupils' learning rather than one's own performance, is a vitally important part of becoming an effective teacher. However, experience shows that trainees often fail to move on in this way unless they are given some direct help. They may be satisfied with having established a particular formula for teaching which keeps the children quiet and occupied, but then fail to look critically at what learning is taking place. This is understandable, but it is not good enough.

Students who find difficulty in moving on to consider pupils' learning often embody two basic misconceptions. First, they may hold views that are not supportive of the need for further development to focus on pupil learning itself. For example, they may believe that teaching is simply about the transmission of knowledge and the accumulation of factual information; that school learning is 'discrete' and separate from learning going on elsewhere in pupils' lives; that giving correct answers denotes understanding. Until these sorts of beliefs have been challenged and trainee teachers have begun to recognize the complexities involved in teaching and learning, they will not be open to developing a more appropriate approach to planning for pupils' learning over time.

A second difficulty may be that the student actually has insufficient confidence in classroom management and control. An appreciation of how pupils learn also demands a willingness to experiment with different strategies of classroom organization. In particular, it demands that pupils take an active role in their learning and, when appropriate, to participate in investigation and enquiry. For some trainee teachers, especially those who have only a tentative hold on classroom control, this may appear very threatening. How much easier to keep pupils sitting in their places and have their attention focused on you!

Trainees have to come to realize that effective classroom control is attained primarily through working *with* young pupils through *well-matched* activities that:

- address pupils' needs and interests
- take account of how pupils learn
- are supportive of pupils' developing understanding of the subject area.

The development of a fuller understanding of effective teaching is often a slow and difficult process for students. In particular, understanding of how pupils learn, and the appropriate role of a teacher in supporting them, takes years to develop.

If trainees are to move on to develop a more realistic understanding of the processes involved in effective teaching, they need to be encouraged to look critically at the teaching procedures they have established and to evaluate their effectiveness. Engaging in Reflective Activities will help in this, but students will certainly need the consistent support and advice of their mentor. Careful collaboration between the two is essential at this point and the task for the mentor and the tutor is particularly challenging at this stage of the student's development. Furlong *et al.* (1994) characterize the role as providing 'critical friendship' through which the trainee is challenged to re-examine their teaching, while at the same time is offered practical support, encouragement and personal affirmation.

Reflective teaching

As we indicated above, there is one further stage of trainee development that needs to be considered and that is their development as reflective practitioners. We would suggest that the focus for student learning in this final stage of development should include:

- broadening the trainee's repertoire of teaching strategies
- encouraging the trainee to take more responsibility for their own professional development
- deepening their understanding of the complexities involved in teaching and learning, including its social, moral and political dimensions.

As the student begins to acquire greater skill and knowledge and develop a more appropriate and realistic understanding of the nature of teaching, so the mentor and the tutor should begin to modify their role yet again. While there will still be times when they need to act as 'model', 'trainer' or 'critical friend', they should also develop the role of 'co-enquirer'. As co-enquirers, mentors and trainees will develop a more open and equal relationship, spending more time working as equal professionals. Such a relationship has the advantage of encouraging students to take greater responsibility for their own learning and allows trainee, mentor and tutor to address some of the complexities of teaching in a spirit of more open enquiry.

However, its most valuable role is in providing a framework for mentor and trainee to discuss planning and teaching at a more fundamental level than before. No longer should mentors present themselves as an authority, knowing the 'right' answers. Rather, through discussion of their planning and teaching, mentors should attempt to 'open up' their work and invite questioning. This can be achieved by, for example:

- focusing on the *complexity* of thinking underlying professional decisions
- exposing the moral, practical and other *dilemmas* underlying professional decisions
- evaluating the social and educational *consequences* of particular professional decisions
- discussing the social, institutional and political *contexts* in which professional decisions have to be made.

It is by participating in such open, professional discussions in relation to their own practice that students can be encouraged to confront the complexities of teaching more deeply. From their initial beginning on the periphery of school life, the trainee should feel drawn into the culture of the school and should feel able to make a worthwhile contribution to its development.

Conclusion

In this supplementary chapter we have reviewed the key role of mentoring in modern teacher education and drawn attention to important mentoring skills. Additionally, we have reviewed characteristic ways in which the competence and self-confidence of trainee teachers often develops, and considered the ways in which mentors might offer, challenge and support progress made.

As the chapter makes clear, becoming a 'reflective teacher' is almost bound to be challenging, but it is made considerably easier with appropriate support from mentors and tutors working together in a learning-oriented school.

Another supplementary chapter, *Starting Out*, continues discussion of such issues in respect of the induction of newly qualified teachers.

Key readings

Mentoring and coaching contribute to all forms of continuing professional development – and work with trainee teachers will certainly benefit from this. In England, a large-scale initiative was:

- CUREE (2007) *National Framework for Mentoring and Coaching*. Coventry: CUREE. (www.curee.co.uk)

Contemporary approaches to teacher education and training are premised on large proportions of school-based work, particularly in England. Whilst many courses remain founded on close partnerships between higher education institutions and schools, mentoring on employment-based routes is even more significant.

This is not new in principle, and earlier innovation included an important project from the University of Oxford. An overview of this work is provided by:

- McIntyre, D. and Hagger, H. (eds) (1996) *Mentors in Schools: Developing the Profession of Teaching*. London: David Fulton.

Of course, the actual learning and development of trainees is at the heart of the mentoring process – hence the emphasis in this chapter. The best study of this remains:

- Furlong, J. and Maynard, T. (1995) *Mentoring Student Teachers: The Growth of Professional Knowledge*. London: Routledge

An excellent analysis of effective mentoring for trainee teachers comes from Edwards and Collison. Their book locates mentoring within a clear understanding of school cultures and the communities of professional practice within them. This is combined with practical advice. Although focused on primary education, the principles are as relevant in secondary schools.

- Edwards, A. and Collison, J. (1996) *Mentoring and Developing Practice in Primary Schools: Supporting Student Teacher Learning in Schools*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

An explicit analysis of mentoring in the context of the development of reflection comes from:

- Tomlinson, P. (1995) *Understanding Mentoring: Reflective Strategies for School-based Teacher Preparation*. Buckingham: Open University Press.

For a light-hearted fictional account of the trials and tribulations of mentors and mentees in school-based teacher education, see:

- Campbell, A. and Kane, I. (1998) *School-based Teacher Education: Tales from a Fictional Primary School*. London: David Fulton.

Good books on mentoring skills are:

- Hampton, G., Rhodes, C and Stokes, M. (2004) *A Practical Guide to Mentoring, Coaching and Peer-networking*. London: Routledge.
- Carroll, C. and Simco. N. (2001) *Succeeding as an Induction Tutor*. Exeter: Learning Matters.
- Moyles, J., Suschitzky, W. and Chapman, L. (1998) *Teaching Fledglings to Fly? Mentoring and Support Systems in Primary Schools*. London: Association of Teachers and Lecturers.
- Fish, D. (1995) *Quality Mentoring for Student Teachers*. London: David Fulton.
- Maynard, T. (ed.) (1997) *An Introduction to Primary Mentoring*. London, Cassell.